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Hanoi Journal, 1967

Suzanne McCormack



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In the fall of 1967, Carol McEldowney, a twenty-four-year-old community organizer living in Cleveland, embarked on a remarkable journey. In a climate of growing domestic unrest and international turmoil, she traveled illegally to North Vietnam with fellow members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to meet the enemy face-to-face. She was determined to understand the foe that had troubled America's leaders in Washington since the end of World War II. With an eye toward history and a recognition of the significance of her journey, McEldowney documented her experiences in the journal reproduced in this book. Through her words we bear witness to a political ideology that saw a connection between the struggles of the poor in America and the tragedy of war-torn Vietnam.

McEldowney first gained the respect of her fellow activists as a student organizer at the University of Michigan. High regard for her intelligence, skill, and hard work with SDS's Economic Recovery Action Program during the years following her graduation in 1964 earned her an invitation to attend an international conference in Czechoslovakia and an offer to continue on to North Vietnam. Though her journal displays only traces of the feminist consciousness that would mark her later political activism, she recorded her observations of North Vietnam clearly aware that she was an outsider?a woman not subject to the military draft, not married to a soldier, and without the heartache of a brother or even a close friend serving in the war.

McEldowney searched for glimpses of everyday life that would help her to better relate to women in Hanoi and the hardships they faced during wartime. As she traveled in North Vietnam, she sought a deeper understanding of the events of her time. Her journal provides readers with a unique lens through which to study those events and gain a new perspective on the Vietnam War era.

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